

Hi Discovers the Hole in the Wall



reconcile the two men, but all his efforts failed, and finally he went away very angry, leaving behind him all the wonderful curios that he had gathered in the wilds of Australia.

Among these curios was a live bird of remarkable appearance which is called the laughing jackass in that country because of its peculiar cry. It utters a sound just like a harsh and contemptuous laugh, which is very startling when heard for the first time, but which, of course, in Australia, where the birds are as common as sparrows are here, nobody notices its noise at all.

The laughing jackass is easily tamed, and this one seemed to be quite as fearless and sociable as any pet; but it rarely uttered the queer cry for which the birds are famous, and, in fact, it was soon observed that it never laughed when there was something funny to laugh at, which fact attracted a great deal of attention from Mr. Ling and his son, Hieronimus, who was called "Hi" for short.

This bird was no bird at all in reality. It was simply the form adopted by a great Australian wizard, or Medicine Man, to enable him to accompany Doctor Johann Manz to America, where he pretended to study human nature, but really was occupied in listening at windows, spying into keyholes and making all manner of trouble for the neighbors of Mr. Ling, although nobody ever suspected the fact.

Ambipoolah, the Australian Shaman or medicine man, had taken the shape of a laughing jackass because he knew that a bird would be allowed a great deal of liberty and never be suspected of anything, especially so foolish a bird as this is.

Yet he was constantly doing mischief, bewitching the servants, the passers-by on the street and even the animals, and only the fact that he knew as yet very little about civilized people or their affairs prevented him from being a most enormous nuisance.

Yet, simple as he was, he merely had to study a thing for a little while to be able to comprehend its

Strange Tale of a Wicked Wizard's Deeds and How His Last Spell, Cast Over Two Children, Caused His Death

workings; therefore he certainly was a dangerous and dreadful wizard to have about the premises.

He had been taken to see some of these remarkable mirrors in the Crystal Maze, mirrors that distort one's form, make a fat man look thin and thin men look like barrels, draw one's face all out of shape and otherwise alter all the looks of people and things; and, after pondering upon the problem, the wizard thought out the principle of the thing and soon arrived at a method of doing the same with mere scraps of common window-glass.

Then he set about finding some means of amusing himself with his discovery.

Now, Doctor Shote had a daughter, a girl of about twelve, I guess, and Doctor Shote, who hated Mr. Ling with a furious hatred, had never allowed her to speak to Hieronimus Ling since the parents had quarreled. Her name was Alfalfa, and she was a lovely girl who bore no spite to either Mr. Ling or his boy Hi. In fact, she

was very fond of both of them. Alfalfa would walk along the whole length of the high wall, look up at it and sigh, while Hi would sit and glare at it and harbor mad thoughts of building a ladder in spite of his father's commands and scaling the wall, and then the laughing jackass would suddenly let out his horrid, croaking laugh as he hopped along the top, glaring down at them with one eye on each.

It tickled him to see the two children moping there and yearning for a glimpse of each other, and soon a great idea came to him. He thought of those funny mirrors that distort people, and he resolved to have some fun. After taking a good, careful look at the position of the sun, he hunted about and soon found some pieces of broken glass, which he carried to his chosen retreat on top of the wall. There he experimented with them, slanting them in different ways until he had arrived at the proper arrangement, and then he laughed long and loudly.

It shows how dangerous the wizard might have become when we reflect how easily he contrived this mischief. He made two holes through the brick wall, each one being larger on one end to attract the attention of his victims, but so arranged that Alfalfa could only see through one and Hi through the other.

In the centre he placed his deceiving glass, as he called his arrangement, and then he waited to see what would happen.

It was not long before the sharp eye of Hi saw the little opening in the brickwork, and he instantly applied his eye to it, only to start back in astonishment at seeing the most startlingly grotesque and impossible-looking girl in the Shote garden.

She had a head as long as a big squash, her eyes were at uneven distances, and her hat was twisted off toward the left side of her crown, while she had no neck at all! Her arms seemed to grow on her chin and her frock was a mere strip of color, although her legs were as long as a stork's.

As she moved along her shape altered only to be funnier; her hat went up into the air, clear off her head and returned again to its place; one side of her forehead shortened, while the other lengthened enormously, while her shoulders were so twisted as to seem to belong to different girls, and her legs were of different lengths! Her eyes were round, oval or long slits by turns, and her mouth changed in the same manner.

It was the most surprising spectacle for a boy to see, and it is no wonder that Hi started back in amazement and felt like running into the house. Then he thought:

"Perhaps this is some

poor, crippled relation of the Shotes and they are keeping her hidden in this garden, but I wonder where dear Alfalfa is all this time. Surely she must play with this funny girl!"

He watched her until she passed from view, being now beyond the range of the narrow crack in the wall. Then he went to spinning his top, but all the time he marvelled at so queer a girl being next door.

Now, Alfalfa had suddenly spied the crack on her side of the wall, an opening so tempting that she instantly applied her eye to it, and she almost fell over in amazement. There was a boy in the Ling's yard who was the most ridiculous thing she had ever seen.

He looked very much like Hi, but, of course, it was impossible, she thought, that it could be her comrade, for his head was about the size of a baseball, his short, stumpy legs were attached to a body like a foot-ball, with almost no arms at all, while his hands and feet were simply enormous, being as big as the dining-room table.

He was spinning a top as large as a barrel, and the sight of this marvel

made the girl tremble, for she had heard of witchcraft and magic and feared that a spell had been put upon her. After watching the strange boy for half an hour she resolved to tell her father, and went into the house.

Then the laughing jackass sent after her a peal of discordant laughter that echoed all through the block. It was a harsh, jeering laugh, and something about it attracted Hi's especial attention, so he watched the bird closely and saw him hasten along the top of the wall to a spot a little beyond Hi's opening, where he vanished over on the Shotes' side.

"Ha! He's up to mischief!" thought the boy and wished that he could look over the wall.

The bird had heard Mr. Shote approaching and hurriedly removed the glass, so that when Alfalfa's father peeped through, of course, he merely saw Hi standing there in the middle of the grass, and he very promptly informed his daughter that she was a little fool.

She hadn't the heart to look again, and when they both went back into the house the jackass replaced the glass.

Next day she again peeped through and once more saw the boy; but, as he was somewhat nearer to her now, he appeared to have altered considerably, for he had no body at all, while his head was quite square. As she looked it changed to a gourd shape, very small at the top but broad at the chin.

Then the boy moved along the wall and she lost sight of him. She soon grew tired of waiting for him to return, and taking her doll she sat down under a tulip tree and there Hi saw her, for he had been peeping through his own aperture for some time, hoping to see the marvelous girl.

He studied her carefully, and it suddenly flashed upon him that she resembled Alfalfa Shote.

This was a shock, but he soon concluded that something had happened to her; some dread disease that had altered her appearance, and his heart ached to climb over and comfort his former playmate.

The uncanny bird had been running along the wall, eagerly watching the two children and delightedly studying their faces to see what effect his trick had upon their feelings, and when he saw that Hi was sorry he guffawed with glee and kicked out so vigorously that he dislodged a loose brick from the top of the wall.

Hi seized the brick and hurled it at the bird, but he dodged it and it vanished over the wall, only to come flying back a moment later. Alfalfa had tossed it over, and then ran to see what happened, while the jackass flew into the open window. Hi picked up the brick and then looked at the wall.

An idea had occurred to him. Why not make the opening larger and thus be able to talk to Alfalfa, just like Pyramus and Thisbe used to do in ancient Grecian days? He immediately set to work, and in a few minutes had loosened a brick and then another, so that within a quarter of an hour he would have had an opening two or three bricks in width had he not been interrupted by the luncheon bell.

After the meal he hastened to the garden, but where his loose bricks had lain against the wall was a green door just as high as his head! Strange to say, Alfalfa saw the door from her side of the wall at the very same instant and hurried to it, eagerly touching a tiny door-knob at the same time. Hi opened it from his side, yet it wasn't the same door! No; each saw a dark passage, very narrow, stretching away into perfect blackness.

Hi at once plunged into the passage, sure that his eyes deceived him, for how could it really be there? Alfalfa hesitated a moment, but then stepped in, for she was anxious to speak to the queer boy that looked like Hi.

Each walked along for many yards, it seemed, and both began to be rather uneasy, for the passage was now very dark; but suddenly Alfalfa saw Hi groping along toward her and she cried out: "Oh, Hi! Is it you? Dear me, I am glad! I was getting scared!"

As soon as he had taken her hand her fear left her, but Hi said:

"This is mighty funny! How did this tunnel get here in this wall? I can't understand it."

Just then the mocking laugh of the jackass rang through the passage, and both turned to look for him, only to find that they were no longer in a tunnel, but in a circular room! The walls closed in around them, imprisoning them in a brick vault to which there was no opening.

Yet a faint light came from cracks in the roof above them, and they saw the jackass walking about on the floor nervously looking upward and seemingly much alarmed at being in such a place.

This was what both of the children thought, for they were also much frightened at finding themselves in this predicament.

"Ha, ha! We are trapped!" cried the bird. "Why, he can talk!" exclaimed Hi, forgetting the peril of their position in his surprise. "I never heard him speak before!"

"Yes, I can talk, and it's lucky for you that I can, else you might never escape from this place. I can tell you how to get out, but I doubt if you'd meet in the course of a whole lifetime another who would assist you at all."

"Well, tell us quickly how it's to be done, for we don't want to stay here any longer!" cried Hi.

"If you can make out the meaning of those letters on the wall," said the bird, with a chuckle, "you will find the wall open at once, otherwise I know not how long you may be imprisoned here!"

Both of the children turned, to behold on the wall a number of large letters, which read thus:

"YCUIVXZRTY * * * I POIUYPOIUY TYHGRTYHFGTRY ||| =

() 375674 * * * 893048 & ZSRTY

||| 576 α & ! * *

"Mercy! It looks as though someone had fired an alphabet at the wall!" cried Hi. "Nobody could make anything out of that!"

"We are lost!" exclaimed Alfalfa.

"Yes, and who is to blame for losing us?" asked Hi. "It's not our fault. We are the victims of some trick of witchcraft! And you, Mister Smarty, who know so much about these letters, perhaps you can tell us who is to blame for our imprisonment here."

"Yes, I can tell you," replied the bird, cocking up one wicked, black eye knowingly. "It was the work of a wizard!"

"I suspected as much!" cried Alfalfa. "It looked like magic!"

"It was done by a most wicked wizard from my own country, whose name is Ambipoolah, and who is so great a magician that nothing in the world can withstand him; that is, nothing but the Great Scupper, who, of course, is always above any wizard on earth."

"And pray who or what is a Scupper?" asked Alfalfa.

"Perhaps I can best describe him by likening him to an immense collar-button, six feet across, and the small part is his head, with two big, glaring red eyes that eat into yours like fire and sear your very soul!"

The laughing jackass was trembling.

"Go on!" cried Hi. "What else. Are you so scared of him?"

"Indeed I am!" replied the bird. "I shake when I think of him. He'd destroy me in a minute!"

"Tell us more about him!" demanded Hi.

"What can he do to you?"

"From his flat body, which I may call the base

of the big collar-button are attached eight long, thin, spidery legs, and at the end of them are fan-shaped feet upon which he stands, but the Scupper doesn't stand much. He moves by flight, and then he turns upside down and these palm-leaf-shaped feet act as wings, or flappers, and carry him, head down, through the air as swiftly as any bullet flies."

"His cry paralyzes one; that is, it paralyzes the guilty, with a sort of electric shock that makes him powerless."

"Then the Scupper doesn't harm innocent people," said Alfalfa.

"Oh, no; certainly not! Why should he?" asked the laughing jackass, with a hypocritical leer. Just then the bird leaped into the air with a funny shriek of fear and began to tremble violently. The children heard a faint distant squeaking sound.

"Ah! I thought so! That's him!" cried the bird, wobbling about on unsteady legs. "Oh, hide me! He's after me!"

He dived into Hi's jacket pocket in a jiffy and crouched there all in a heap, but the boy could feel him tremble. Then they heard the queer squawk again and the walls of the dungeon fell apart, cracking like an almond shell.

There stood the most wonderful thing! I can't describe it, but you can see from the picture just what he was like. As he stood there peering into the vault with great goggle, red eyes, his palm-leaf-like feet flattened against the hard ground with a throbbing sound like distant machinery at work.

"Ah!" said the Scupper, when he saw the children. "Something told me that I was needed here. You have been imprisoned by somebody! Don't you know who did it?"

His voice sounded like a mouth-organ as he uttered these words, and the laughing jackass shook in Hi's pocket as if he had fever and ague.

"I have learned that it was the work of an Australian wizard," replied Hi.

"An Australian wizard! Did you learn his name?" cried the Scupper.

"Well, it was a long, hard name; something like 'hooblooby,'" began Hi, when Alfalfa interrupted.

"No, it sounded more like 'candy-puller!'"

"What! Could it possibly be Ambipoolah?" cried the Scupper, leaping into the air. "Ambipoolah, the villain whom I have been seeking all over the Antipodes!"

"Yes, that's the name!" said Hi. "I remember it very well, although I only heard it once."

"Then he is near here!" cried the Scupper, joyfully. "And if so I will find him!"

The laughing jackass shook like a corn-popper in Hi's pocket.

"What harm has he done you?" inquired the boy.

"I tried to reform him and make him better," responded the Scupper. "He pretended that he wished to improve and do good to mankind, and therefore instead of destroying him, as I have destroyed almost all other wizards, I released him, only to learn afterward that he not only did even more harm, but went around making fun of my figure and speaking evil of me!"

"That was mean!" said Alfalfa.

"The ungrateful wretch little merited my clemency!"

"How sharper than a serpent's thinks it is to have a toothless child," as Shakespeare says," quoted Alfalfa.

"That's not right!" exclaimed the Scupper. "It's 'How sharper than a toothless serpent it is to have a thankless child.'"

"No," said Hi, "it goes this way: 'How sharper than a child's serpent it is to have a thankless tooth.'"

"Hum, him! Maybe it's 'How sharper than a toothless child it is to have a serpent's thanks.' That's it! Now we have it



The Girl Hi Saw

right!"

At this the jackass suddenly burst into a fit of laughter, and at the sound the Scupper started back.

"What is it?" he asked. "What have you in your pocket?"

"It's a laughing jackass," replied Hi, and although the bird struggled and tried hard to creep into the very depths of his pocket, he drew him fluttering forth. "My Uncle Johann brought him from Australia," he added, as he held him up, trembling and faint, for the Scupper to inspect him.

"Aha!" roared the Scupper, trembling, too, with eagerness. "It is thee, mine enemy! Ha! I have you now, guilty Ambipoolah!"

"Is this Ambipoolah?" demanded Hi.

"It is that villain, masquerading as a bird!" replied the Scupper. "He is at the end of his wickedness! He has laughed at something—that was not of his own creation, and that's fatal to him! That was his doom, for all his wizzing depended on the fact that he could only snicker at the wickedness he was up to, but never to even smile at the things others consider funny. Now he's done for, and I will not even have to finish him!"

Sure enough, the laughing jackass was showing signs of approaching death.

Hi dropped him to the ground, where he fluttered awhile, and then suddenly, croaking dimly, he died.

"Well, I will take you home," said the Scupper, "and see your parents. I will explain to them your long absence and endeavor to reconcile them."

He turned a quick flip-flop and asked them to mount upon his broad back, after which he flew noiselessly through the air, and then it was that they were surprised to discover that they had been taken miles away from home by the bird.

When they arrived home they were further amazed to learn that they had been absent for two months and both families had been mourning them as dead, but as this had reconciled the Shotes and the Lings, the children rejoiced very much, especially when they found that the brick wall had been torn down and nothing divided the two gardens.

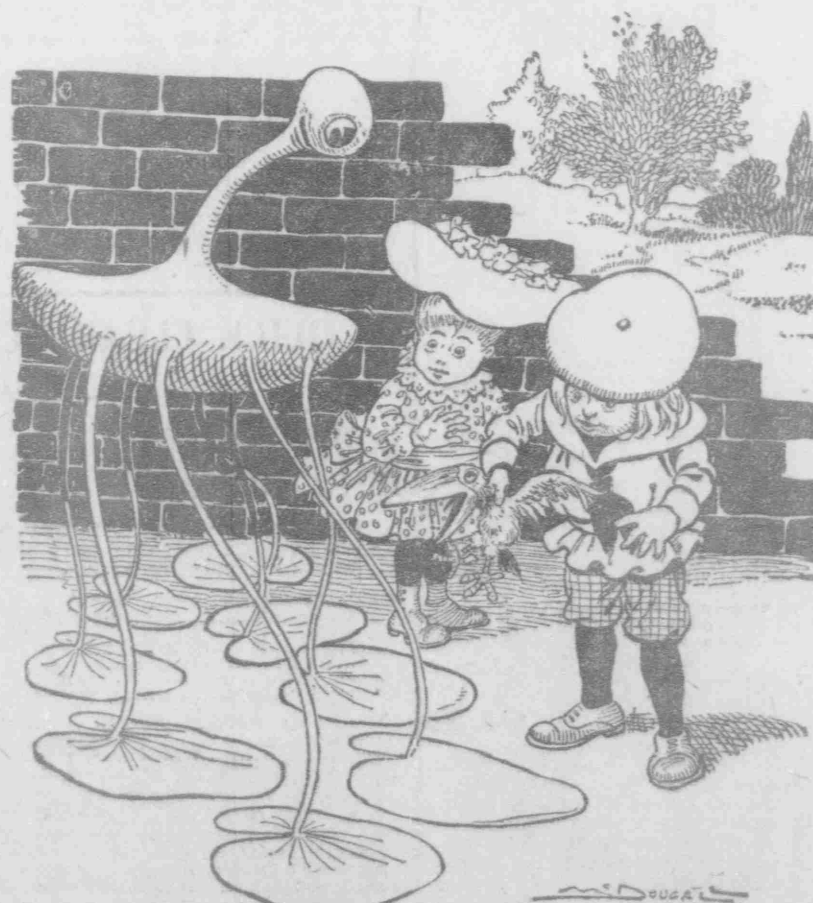
In the excitement of their return nobody noticed the Scupper's departure, and he went away without receiving anybody's thanks, which mortified Alfalfa very much whenever she reflected upon his quotation about a thankless child, for she did not wish him to consider her that.

All this happened long ago, and as I have never heard of the Scupper since, I suppose he has returned to Australia, or to some other land where they still have wizards.

WALT McDOUGALL



The Boy Alfalfa Saw



"Ha! Mine Enemy at Last!" Said the Scupper.